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Alex Prager: *Compulsion*

April 5 – May 12, 2012

Opening Reception Thursday, April 5, 6-8pm



Yancey Richardson Gallery is pleased to present *Compulsion*, an exhibition of new work by contemporary artist Alex Prager. The exhibition will feature a selection of color photographs from the series, as well as the artist's new short film, *La Petite Mort*, with accompanying film stills. The exhibition will be shown simultaneously in London, Los Angeles and New York.

MoMA curator Roxana Marcoci has described Prager's work as "intentionally loaded," saying "it reminds me of silent movies – there is something pregnant, about to happen, a mix of desire and angst." Prager's new work furthers her exploration of subversive narratives through the construction

of "scenes" inspired by media tragedies and paired with emotive close-ups of eyes. The eyes, whether interpreted as belonging to the viewer or the subject, operate as a mode of investigation—an aid to decoding the scenes and implicating the viewer by provoking an emotional response.

Inspired by the photography of Weegee and Enrique Metinides, and films such as *Metropolis* and *Un Chien Andalou*, *Compulsion* confirms Prager's vivid cinematic aesthetic. Unlike her previous work, however, the protagonists remain anonymous and distant. Prager's new series investigates the complexity of observation within a society inundated by compulsive spectators, as well as the recurrent discourse in photography—that "meaning" is often derived from a multiplicity of gazes.

In addition to provocative juxtapositions, Prager manipulates the scenes through her choice of cropping, continually interrogating the truth content within photography — a trope as old as the medium itself. As artist John Baldessari has noted: "For most of us photography stands for the truth, but a good artist can make a harder truth by manipulating forms...It fascinates me how [one] can manipulate the truth so easily by the way [you] juxtapose opposites or crop the image or take it out of context." Prager's altered and manufactured scenes, in conjunction with the evocative eyes, remove the images from their original context and allow them to acquire new associations.

In her new short film, *La Petite Mort*, starring French actress Judith Godrèche, Prager navigates the mystery of death through a woman experiencing the boundaries of her body and those of this world. Prager's *La Petite Mort* declares that "the act of dying, and the act of transcendent love, are two experiences cut from the same cloth - the former a grand exit, and the latter a slow escape. Indeed, many of the world's greatest poets have long considered a passionate interlude as man's closest moment to seeing god." The film features music by composer Ali Helnwein and Director of Photography Matthew Libatique (*Black Swan*, *Iron Man*, *Requiem for a Dream*).

Born in 1979, Alex Prager is a self-taught photographer who lives in Los Angeles, California. Featured in MoMA's *New Photography 2010*, Prager's work has been exhibited at institutions worldwide. Additionally, her photographs are in the permanent collection of several major museums, including MoMA, New York, the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Her work has featured in publications such as the *New York Times Magazine*, *Vogue*, *W Magazine*, and *Art in America*.

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